

REMARKS

This communication is being filed in response to the final Office Action having a mailing date of January 26, 2005. In the final Office Action, claims 1-28 and 30-48 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 102(e) or on the basis of 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) based on certain pieces of prior art. Claim 29 was objected to as being dependent upon a rejected base claim, but the Examiner indicated that claim 29 would be allowable if rewritten in independent form to include the limitations of its base claims, for which the applicants thank the Examiner. Claims 1, 2, 3, 11, 16, 17, 24, 28-33, 35-42, 44, and 46 are amended as shown. No new matter has been added. Claims 25-27 are canceled herein without prejudice. With this filing, claims 1-24 and 28-48 are pending in the application.

Objected claim 29 has been rewritten in independent form to include the recitations of its respective base claims 25-27. More specifically, the Examiner indicated in the Office Action that the recitation of hierarchical levels that include cities, where the cities include neighborhoods, the neighborhoods include houses, and the houses have rooms are not taught or suggested by the prior art. The applicants thank the Examiner for carefully considering this feature and for recognizing its distinctiveness over the prior art. Indeed, the prior art is completely lacking in disclosure, teaching, or suggestion of any such hierarchical structure, which the applicants have termed/labeled as “cities, neighborhoods, houses, and rooms” in claim 29. The scope of claim 29 includes such hierarchical and/or directory arrangements and their equivalents that organize at least one user into the hierarchy as claimed, using a suitable label to identify each of the various levels of the hierarchy. Accordingly, claim 29 is now in condition for allowance. In certain embodiments of the rich media communication systems and methods, a user can communicate with one or more other users via one or more theaters (or theater windows).

The various other independent claims are amended as shown to include features similar to that of claim 29, namely, the recitation of a hierarchical structure that includes cities, neighborhoods, houses, and rooms. Where appropriate, at least some of these claims are amended to provide proper antecedent basis with regards to the terms “person” and “user.”

Therefore, independent claims 1, 2, 3, 11, 16, 17, 24, 29-33, 35-42, 44, and 46 that have been amended to recite the hierarchical structure are now also in condition for allowance.

Overall, none of the references singly or in any motivated combination disclose, teach, or suggest what is recited in the independent claims. Thus, given the above amendments and accompanying remarks, the independent claims are now in condition for allowance. The dependent claims that depend directly or indirectly on these independent claims are likewise allowable based on at least the same reasons and based on the recitations contained in each dependent claim.

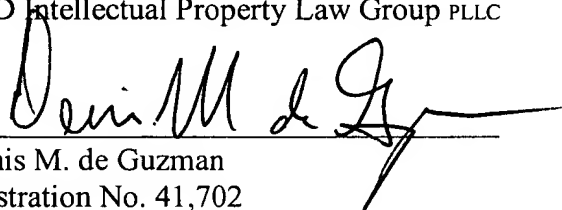
If the undersigned attorney has overlooked a teaching in any of the cited references that is relevant to the allowability of the claims, the Examiner is requested to specifically point out where such teaching may be found. Further, if there are any informalities or questions that can be addressed via telephone, the Examiner is encouraged to contact the undersigned attorney at (206) 622-4900.

The Director is authorized to charge any additional fees due by way of this Amendment, or credit any overpayment, to our Deposit Account No. 19-1090.

All of the claims remaining in the application are now clearly allowable. Favorable consideration and a Notice of Allowance are earnestly solicited.

Respectfully submitted,

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